

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

Critical Essays and Literary Notes, by Bayard Taylor. 12mo, pp. 352. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The present volume of Bayard Taylor's prose writings is introduced by a singularly intelligent and appropriate preface from the pen of the editor. Mrs. Marie Hansen-Taylor, contains a selection from his miscellaneous papers mostly relating to scenes and persons in Germany, and notes on books and events comprising a part of his contributions to American journalism and the periodical press during the latter years of his life. Mrs. Taylor aptly remarks that the volume may be regarded as a sequel to "The Student in German Literature," as it illustrates the work of the author in the broader literary and analytical criticism, in which he took a deep interest, although he did not consider them essential to the attainment of the supreme objects of his intellectual life. His critical ambition was directed toward the higher forms of creative art, in which it may be said to have achieved so far a degree of mastership, but at the same time, in whatever sphere of literary duty he was engaged, he never lost the same delicate conscience which was a vital element of his spiritual nature. His critical writing, moreover, summed him to the exercise of his best faculties. He never placed a low estimate on the importance or the difficulty of the service. In most of less congenial labors, the time devoted to literary criticism was like an interval of grateful respite. His passion for reading, which was truly exceptional in so profuse a writer, was retained almost to the latest day of his life. Hence the study of illustrious authors, or the life-work of famous men and women, for the purpose of pronouncing judgment on their writings, was not a burden, but a satisfaction. No man was better qualified for this branch of literary composition than himself. It brought to its accomplishment equal soundness of judgment, sincerity of purpose, refinement of perception, generous catholicity of taste, and large practical experience. His intense love of literature and art, and his earnest desire for the advancement of American letters, afforded a constant source of inspiration, and at once lightened and animated the labor of his pen. "His critical writings," as is admirably said, "were the consummate conclusions of his mature intellect, based on that lofty ideal of beauty which is the true foundation of all art." The volume possesses a peculiar interest as a specimen of Bayard Taylor's familiar prove, the rare excellence of which may be lost sight of amidst the radiant splendors of his poetry. His descriptive power was equalled by few writers in our language. The force of his imagination was softened by the simplicity of his diction, giving a singular naturalness and life to the color of his scenes. In comparison with more diffusive writers, his vocabulary, perhaps, was somewhat limited, but his choice of words was exquisite. This, however, betrayed no effort, no consciousness, on his part, and his style had a natural aptitude and grace which attested its spontaneity; and his sentences, though constructed in accordance with the rules of art, flowed with such sweet facility as to show their origin in home-born sources. The brief, unpremeditated sketch of Bayard Taylor's last interview with Thackeray affords a slight example of the qualities referred to: "That hour of the sunny May-day returns to memory as I write. The quiet of the library, a little withdrawn from the ceaseless roar of London; the soft grass of the bit of garden, moist from recent shower, seen through the open window; the smoke-suspirited sunshine, stealing gently along the wall; and before me the square, massive head, the prematurely gray hair, the large, clear, sad eyes, the frank, winning mouth, with its smile of boyish sweetness, of the man whom I honor as a master, while he gave me the right to love him as a friend. I was to leave the next day for a temporary home on the Continent, and he was planning how he could visit me with his daughters. The proper season, the time, and the expense were carefully calculated: he described the visit in advance, with a gay, exuberant fancy; and his last words, as he gave me the warm, strong hand I was never again to press, were, 'Auf Wiedersehen!' The descriptive poems relating the visits of Bayard Taylor in Weimar are among the most interesting in the volume, and will greatly enhance the universal regard that such admirable studies could not have been used in the composition of the biography of Goethe and Schiller, which was so long a favorite object of the writer's life.

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